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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 002937

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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIAN FM DISCUSSES REGIONAL SECURITY WITH DASD
HUDDLESON

Classified By: CDA Tulinabo Mushingi for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

SUMMARY

1. (C) Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin told visiting DASD Ambassador Huddleston the GoE is confident that U.S.-Ethiopia relations are as strong as ever, and agreed to work with the Ministry of Defense to resolve issues surrounding Leahy Vetting requirements for the Ethiopian military. He urged the U.S. to remain committed to ensuring stability in Sudan and Somalia, noted that the Government of Ethiopia (GoE) is increasingly concerned about security in Yemen, and expressed appreciation for USG support of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). End summary.

2. (SBU) Visiting Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Africa Ambassador Vicki Huddleston and CDA Tulinabo Mushingi met with Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin on December 10 for 60 minutes. Seyoum was joined by Director General for Europe and the Americas Tesfaye Yilma, Americas Director Tebeje Berhe Shook, and Assistant Spokesman Wahide Belay. The U.S. was also represented by Brigadier Gen. Wallace Farris of the Joint Staff, U.S. Defense Attache Col. Bradley Anderson, Col. Saul Bracero, and PolOff Skye Justice (notetaker).

Bilateral Meetings "Extremely Important and Productive"

3. (C) Minister Seyoum opened the meeting by expressing the GoE's appreciation for the "extremely important and productive" bilateral talks held in Washington on November 5. Seyoum added that when the team of senior GoE officials returned from Washington, they assessed they had behaved "like a crying child" prior to the talks. He explained that their numerous complaints were the result of a gap in communication, but they had been solidly reassured during the talks that the U.S.-Ethiopia relationship was as strong as ever. DASD Huddleston responded that her delegation was in Addis to follow up on the bilateral discussions, and encouraged Seyoum to ensure that momentum gained during the meetings is not lost. To this end, Seyoum proposed that the Embassy work with the GoE to establish a more organized structure for holding regular bilateral meetings, noting that such a mechanism had proven helpful in the GoE's relations with the European Union.

Leahy Vetting: Positive Outlook, but No Details

4. (C) Amb. Huddleston expressed that even though Prime Minister Meles had assured her the U.S.-Ethiopia security

relationship would remain strong even if the current dispute over Leahy Vetting was not resolved, she was committed to resolving it. She noted that it would be difficult to carry out some of our military cooperation planned for the coming year without resolving this issue, and that canceling such activities was not the ideal way to increase security cooperation as agreed during the Washington talks. Seyoum responded that he understood that there were no exceptions to the Leahy Vetting requirements, and while both sides had strong positions on the matter, a way forward had to be found. He said he had discussed the issue with Defense Minister Siraj Fergessa and would do so again, adding that he was confident that the dispute could be resolved.

U.S. Leadership on Sudan and Somalia Will Be Decisive

15. (C) Seyoum praised the USG for its commitment to ensuring stability in Sudan, warning that an implosion in Sudan could have broad regional impacts and adding, "we only have one chance to get this right without an outbreak of violence." He said signals on the ground were not encouraging, as the GoE believed elements in the north were provoking unrest in the south in order to limit the south's ability to stand united as it declared independence. Seyoum described U.S. leadership in ensuring peace and stability in both Sudan and Somalia as "decisive."

16. (C) Seyoum also conveyed the GoE's appreciation for USG support of IGAD, including DAS Karl Wycoff's participation in the recent IGAD Ministerial Council Meeting in Djibouti. He

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noted that IGAD has directed the GoE and Government of Kenya to send a joint delegation to Juba and Khartoum to "reinforce our government's concerns that they are moving slowly and must engage seriously. The level of trust between the two sides is not encouraging."

GoE Urges Attention on Yemen

17. (C) Echoing concerns voiced by Prime Minister Meles, Seyoum noted the GoE is concerned about security in Yemen. He stated that Iran is active in Yemen and throughout the Red Sea area, and that it would be easy for al Qaeda to infiltrate Yemen to use it as a staging area. Noting decisions by the U.S. and NATO to send additional troops to Afghanistan, he cautioned that Somalia presents a similar threat as a safe haven and base of operations for al Qaeda, and that Yemen could present a similar threat in the future.

18. (U) This message has been cleared by Ambassador Huddleston.
MUSHINGI